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## ABSTRACT

The role of clergy in the successful desegregation of Dayton Schools from 1969-79 is described. Prior to a 1976 federal court order to begin busing, the clergy were unable to agree on desegregation issues. However, during the second phase of the controversy, they publicly endorsed peaceful implementation of busing. A conclusion is that the clergy failed to take a strong stand for desegregation in the early years, but later urged peaceful compliance with the law. Although they were instrumental in maintaining order, they failed to take an active role in creating a racially integrated community. The discussion illustrates the complexities of reaching community consensus when moral questions are defined as political issues. (41 references) (LMI)

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On September 7, 1976 Dayton City Schools began the first program of court-ordered busing in Ohio to end racial segregation. On that day estimated attendance was 80% of all 41,289 students.<sup>1</sup> There were no protests. On September 8, 1976 newspapers such as the New York Times carried articles praising Dayton for having the most peaceful opening to that date.<sup>2</sup>

Clergy in the Dayton area played an important role in the success of the desegregation of the city schools. They joined in ecumenical groups publicly supporting peaceful measures as desegregation was implemented.<sup>3</sup> But before the U.S. District Court ordered the school people to begin busing, the clergy were unable to agree that the schools should be desegregated even though at least one superintendent of schools asked them to do so.

The story of the conflict among the clergy illustrates the difficulties Americans have in defining a common social good. It shows they can more easily agree to follow a set of legal procedures and obey a judicial decision. And it implies that when Americans tend to turn moral questions into political ones, they make it difficult to find a resolution that reinforces a sense of community.

Up until the buses rolled, the Dayton City Schools were segregated. In 1973 David Kirby and Robert Crain published a study entitled Political Strategies in Northern Schools

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Desegregation that found Dayton schools to be among the most segregated in northern and western states.<sup>4</sup> This report was based on 1971-72 statistics. At that time, of the 53,936 pupils 42.7% were of minority groups. Yet, of the ten high schools in the city, three had greater than 96% minority enrollment and four had less than 6% minority students. Elementary schools shared the same pattern. And in 1969, faculty and administrative staff was distributed similarly into White and Black schools.

But in 1969, the then U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare investigated segregation in Dayton City Schools. They demanded that by 1971 the faculty be integrated.<sup>5</sup> The total faculty numbered nearly 2500 at that time and nearly 29% were members of a minority group. In order to desegregate the faculty, nearly 650 teachers had to move. The administration and the teacher's association cooperated to make this as painless as possible. And it went fairly smoothly.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps because of continued federal pressure the percentage of minority teachers rose consistently reaching 38% in 1979 even though the number of teachers in the system dropped to 1805 in the same year. A similar pattern held true for counselors and for administrators.<sup>7</sup>

Pupil desegregation was another matter. The U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare threatened to release a similar report and order about student segregation, but it never did.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps because of this sudden unwillingness to get involved, H.E.W. allowed pupil desegregation to become a great controversy in Dayton. The fight went through two distinct phases.

The first phase extended from 1968 to 1971. During this time, then Superintendent Wayne Carle had the support of four members of the school board who were called liberals. They

helped him bring several innovations to the Dayton City Schools such as middle schools, individually guided instruction, and sensitivity training for administrators. However, Carle and the liberal board members were opposed by the remaining three members of the school board. These people belonged to a conservative party called Serving Our Schools that had been formed in 1969. Perhaps as a result of these board members' resistance, the voters defeated bond levies at every opportunity no matter how Wayne Carle demonstrated their need.<sup>9</sup>

The second phase extended from 1972-79. During this period, Serving Our Schools members controlled the school board and the issue of pupil desegregation was argued in federal courts. While Carle remained in office,, he fought the conservative board. Carle also testified in court against his board supplying information to show why the schools should be ordered to desegregate. Carle left Dayton schools in July, 1973.

As the controversy falls into two phases, the involvement of religious leaders and religious schools falls into two types. At first, the question was whether or not to support Wayne Carle and his efforts to bring about desegregation. This continued after Carle left and ended in November, 1973 when the liberals lost their last serious attempt to regain control of the school board until 1979 when claims of financial mismanagement weakened the conservative hold.

The second phase lasted from 1974 until 1976 and found the clergy supporting peaceful efforts to resolve the controversy and finally peaceful obedience to a lawful order. Their emphasis was to encourage people to eschew violent confrontations and to work for a peaceful resolution. After the court order went into

effect in September, 1976, public opposition ceased even though the school board kept up legal appeals until 1979 and small groups of citizens met to consider ways to stop the desegregation. Clerical involvement with school desegregation ended with the general acceptance of busing.

During the first phase, Wayne Carle was the prominent figure. His shadow even fell into the 1975 school board election though by then he had been gone from Dayton for two years.<sup>10</sup> Carle underwent personal changes as he worked through the controversies of 1969-73. Paul Dimond says Carle was a Mormon who opposed desegregation when he arrived in Dayton. As he changed his mind, he lost his religious and social standing; Carle was excommunicated.<sup>11</sup> At any rate, to some extent, the changes Carle underwent mirror the rising intensity of the controversy over pupil desegregation.

Newspaper reports of his first school board meeting in 1968 say that Carle heard complaints about racial segregation from thirty Black youngsters and a Black pastor of a protestant church. These reports note Carle took a more activist role than did his predecessor, Robert French, who had been superintendent for twenty-one years.<sup>12</sup> But Carle did not pledge to end segregation at that time and he worked slowly toward it. For example, in 1970 the civil rights office of H.E.W. accused him of avoiding controversies and thereby increasing segregation in the schools.<sup>13</sup>

However, Carle and his school board moved toward desegregation. They acknowledged that past actions of the board had contributed to racial segregation and they set up citizens advisory committees to search for ways to bring about quality

integrated schooling.<sup>14</sup> On December 8, 1971, just before the conservative board was to take control, the lame-duck liberal board acted in a most dramatic fashion. They passed resolutions asking the State of Ohio to force surrounding school districts to join with Dayton in a metropolitan desegregation plan. And they moved to immediately set up a plan to desegregate the city schools.<sup>15</sup>

This act marked the end of the first phase of the controversy. A new school board took office on January 3, 1972 and rescinded those resolutions. The N.A.A.C.P. filed suit in U.S. District court in Columbus on April 17, 1972 seeking reinstatement of the integration program.<sup>16</sup> The conservative school board fought the suit.

Dayton area religious leaders and religious educators disagreed about the rightness of Wayne Carle's actions. Catholic educators tried to support desegregation. For example, in 1968 and again in 1969 six Catholic elementary schools exchanged thirty-five White children and fifty-five Black youngsters in a parent-sponsored drive to desegregate.<sup>17</sup> In 1969 the Dayton area Catholic schools set up a DeFacto Segregation Committee to study racial isolation in Catholic schools.<sup>18</sup> And by 1976 stories appeared in the Dayton papers proclaiming that Catholic schools had no trouble desegregating a year or two earlier by merging schools.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, Catholic leaders tried to support Wayne Carle. In 1969, Carle asked the surrounding districts to join in a study by the federal government to find answers to racial segregation in Dayton. Monsignor Edward A. Connaughton, then Dayton area Catholic schools superintendent, agreed to help saying the study

could advance desegregation of Catholic schools.<sup>20</sup> And in 1972 Reverend Gail A. Poynter, then area superintendent, introduced Wayne Carle as he was pleading for desegregation to a meeting of parents as a voice in the wilderness.<sup>21</sup>

But other clerics' response was mixed. On December 20, 1971, after his school board had passed the resolution calling for immediate desegregation of the schools, Wayne Carle sent a letter to 435 area religious leaders on plain stationery at his own expense asking them to bear witness in behalf of this measure.<sup>22</sup> A religious writer for a local newspaper conducted a brief survey to determine the responses to Carle's letter. She noticed, with the exception of two letters to the newspaper, Dayton area clergy had been silent on the issue of desegregation. When she asked them how they felt, she found a range of views. A Baptist minister told her it was immoral to force pupils to integrate. A Presbyterian said all social separations are unChristian. Pastors of the two largest Protestant churches in Dayton would not answer. And a spokesperson for an ecumenical council, Metropolitan Churches United, said they set up a task force to consider the issue but had no answer yet.<sup>23</sup>

Interestingly, the religious writer found Catholic priests uniformly strong in their support of desegregation. The views of priests conflict with reports of the actions of Catholic voters. For example, when the first members of the Serving Our Schools party won school board seats in 1970, SOS received a surprising show of support from the east side of Dayton. This area is predominantly white and it has a heavy Catholic population. Newspaper reports held that Catholic voters were disaffected with public schools and threatened desegregation. The newspapers

added that Catholics in the east side supported the SOS party and wanted to reject school board levies.<sup>24</sup> Thus, it could be the Catholic priests tried to balance the public perception of these Catholic voters.

The year 1973 was to be the last of the first phase of clerical involvement with the issue of school desegregation. In January of that year, the conservative members of the school board replaced Carle with a man of their own inclinations, John Maxwell, a former principal of a local high school. A group of 25 ministers tried unsuccessfully to recall those board members.<sup>25</sup>

The year ended with the November school board election. In this election liberals lost an effort to win an all important fourth seat on the board even though they outspent the conservatives by more than twice, expending over \$25,000, and gained the support of the business and civic leaders in Dayton.<sup>26</sup> Although the margin of their loss was small, seven votes when the winners polled around 20,000 votes each, liberals seemed to give up interest in school board politics afterwards.<sup>27</sup>

Liberals in Dayton had trouble organizing themselves. The conventional wisdom was the conservative SOS faction gained a majority in 1971 because the liberals could not control themselves and fielded too many candidates. Although they won 62% of the vote and gained approval of a 13.6 mill school bond levy, they spread their votes so thinly that a conservative won a seat making SOS the majority party in 1972.<sup>28</sup>

The reason the conservatives were organized may have been explained by a public opinion poll conducted in 1972. It found conservative SOS members displayed intense intergroup agreement against school busing and school taxes. Such agreement was

lacking among the liberals.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, the conservative SOS party had become a machine complete with dues, ward-like organization and careful selection of candidates. And the SOS portrayed itself as the party of the people opposing the paternalism of a business elite.<sup>30</sup> In 1973 the liberals organized themselves into a party called Citizens for Better Schools.

The involvement of the clergy was mixed in this as in other elections. In 1971 a Black protestant minister, Boyd Hinton, had campaigned as a conservative SOS candidate. In 1973 a different Black protestant minister, U.A. Hughey, campaigned as a liberal CBS candidate. Both lost. In 1973 no member of the clergy appeared among the published list of campaign contributors for either party.<sup>31</sup>

In general in 1973, the clergy provided opportunities for school board candidates to debate the issues. They opened their churches to meetings and they tried to host them in ways allowing all sides to be heard.<sup>32</sup> Debates became a fixture in school board elections after this campaign but they were held in high school auditoriums rather than churches.

During these debates liberal CBS members were silent about desegregation and about busing. They said the issue should be left to the courts. Privately, the liberals acknowledged their friends knew where they stood and bringing up their views of busing would antagonize their enemies.<sup>33</sup> This politic move was reflected in a change among clergy. Whatever effort they took championing desegregation became pleas to approach the question in a peaceful manner.

This shift became most noticeable after September 19, 1975. On that date, Charles Glatt, a 46-year-old desegregation consultant from The Ohio State University, was shot to death by an avowed segregationist. The shooting seemed to quiet everything and the avoidance of violence became a central cry in the desegregation issue.<sup>34</sup> And after December, 1975 when U.S. District Judge Carl Rubin ordered desegregation and accepted a plan calling for busing an estimated 13,000 students,<sup>35</sup> Dayton area clergy became prominent in newspaper stories.

Church groups organized summer camps that became exchange programs helping children prepare for the busing that would come in the Fall.<sup>36</sup> Then Superintendent John Maxwell sent a letter to 520 area clergy asking them to hold a prayer vigil in climax to a public prayer-for-kids weekend. He received an overwhelmingly favorable response.<sup>37</sup> And the Interfaith Task Force of Metropolitan Churches United published a pledge signed by 120 groups vowing to pursue and support peaceful measures as desegregation was implemented.<sup>38</sup>

Catholic leaders joined in. Then Archbishop of the Cincinnati Archdiocese, Reverend Joseph L. Bernadin, asked Dayton area priests to pray for and promote peaceful implementation of desegregation of the city schools. Furthermore, Reverend Gail Poynter, then Superintendent of the Catholic schools in Dayton, announced that Catholic schools would not become a haven for students fleeing desegregation and he closed enrollments.<sup>39</sup>

Desegregation did not turn into a bonanza for private religious schools. There were some increases. Temple Christian doubled enrollment to 425 students but this turned out to be a temporary increase as by 1986 enrollment returned to 220. A

system of five schools unaffiliated to any denomination, Dayton Christian Schools, began in 1971 and in 1976 had 350-400 new students. But the superintendent said this was a normal increase not caused by desegregation.<sup>40</sup> Hillel Academy remained small.

Public schools' enrollment declined and at the same time the percentage of minority students present increased. In 1987 the enrollment had dropped to 30,212 and of these 62.7% were from a minority group. Yet it is hard to say desegregation caused white flight.

Dayton went through a severe recession in the 1970's. In 1969 there were 883,000 workers employed in manufacturing jobs in Dayton. By 1980 that figure dropped by more than half to 387,000 as firms such as Dayton Tire and National Cash Register and Frigidaire moved their production facilities. Similar declines went through sales and services industries. Probably as a result, the population of the city declined from 243,459 in 1970 to 193,536 in 1980 even though the size of the city increased by 10.1 square miles in that time. The city remained predominantly white; 62% of the population was white in 1980. But the percentage of people over 65 years of age increased from 10.7% in 1970 to 11.8% in 1980.<sup>41</sup> Thus, one can say the changes in the population in the school children was probably caused by changes in the economic picture in Dayton.

The controversy over the desegregation of Dayton City Schools was an important one. Could the picture have been different if clergy had supported desegregation early in 1970 and as strongly as they came together to urge peaceful compliance with a lawful order? Perhaps not. But if they had, then Dayton area clergy may have become symbols pointing to a common good

such as integration that is more energizing than that of calm and orderly co-existence. Although Dayton area clergy deserved and received credit for helping maintain order, they missed a chance to make as great a plea for a racially integrated society.

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